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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 DJIBOUTI 000282

SIPDIS

NOFORN

AF/EX FOR D. YAMAMOTO, AF/E FOR J. GAFFNEY, OSD FOR T.
WHELAND

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SUBJECT: OLHAYE MEETING WITH GENERAL ROBESON

Classified By: POLOFF C. BEAMER FOR REASONS 1.5 A and D

SUMMARY

1. (S/NF) Djiboutian Ambassador to the United States Roble Olhaye met at Camp Lemonier in Djibouti on February 25 with Brigadier General Mastin Robeson. Ambassador Olhaye is nearing the end of a two week stay in Djibouti and was present for Ambassador Ragsdale's credentialing ceremony on the 23rd. General Robeson and Olhaye focused on the way forward for a long term lease relationship between the Department of Defense and the Government of Djibouti. End Summary.

OLHAYE/ROBESON

2. (S/NF) Olhaye congratulated General Robeson for having achieved a lot in a short period, making a number of camp improvements, and making his presence felt over the Red Sea and in neighboring countries. General Robeson thanked Olhaye and asked if he had suggestions for how his organization's effectiveness could be improved. Olhaye responded that he thought the task force was doing the right thing, coordinating with militaries in the region and making people feel accepted. He said that President was positive about their actions and that their civil affairs efforts in particular had been very well received in Djibouti.

3. (S/NF) General Robeson then raised the base's long term lease relationship and how to make it amenable to both sides. Olhaye responded that he had discussed the issue with DOD for the Government of Djibouti. Djibouti welcomed the U.S. presence and would continue to do all it could to provide facilities but it desired a long term commitment. He said Djibouti was not in a position to put any timelines or constraints on the USG, that the U.S. was "welcome to stay permanently if it wished and to expand, to be more comfortable." Olhaye added that Djibouti will try its best to provide what the military needs and to be welcoming. General Robeson asked Olhaye if he would be involved in lease negotiations and the Olhaye responded positively that he would be representing the Djiboutian Government in Washington. He went on to say that the lease was not really a question of signatures or price noting that his initial proposal to the USG was for 150 million dollars. "The 15 million we're actually getting is only important to us as a symbol of partnership, what comes from the U.S. presence here is what is important."

4. (S/NF) General Robeson responded that eventually the U.S. would not have a permanent presence in Djibouti but that we wanted to leave a stronger, more capable Djiboutian military behind that was doing things right. He stressed that with efforts in border security, coastal security, and anti-terrorism he wanted to help the Djiboutian Military understand the impact it can have nationally by partnering with outlying regions and acting as an engine of national development.

5. (S/NF) Olhaye stated that he thought the specifics of military to military discussions should be resolved by General Robeson's leadership. Olhaye saw no reason for stalemate on such issues but said they should be handled fast and in an acceptable manner here on the ground. He asked General Robeson to "use your wisdom, see their point of view, come to consensus and resolve the matter." General Robeson responded that he was looking for a positive way to move forward so that the military to military relationship was a happy one.

6. (S/NF) In this regard, General Robeson said, he had two options for resolving current tensions that revolved around the Djiboutian airbase/Presidential hangar that was ceded to the USG under the current lease. The first was to move the airbase to an area near the civilian hangers. Olhaye stated that that was not possible. General Robeson went on to note that the Djiboutians could stay in that space but that the security measures he would take would hem them in and they would be unable to grow. The General emphasized that either

the Djiboutian military needed to content itself with the current space limitations or move further east of Camp Lemonier near the water. Olhaye said either option was possible, there would be no noise on the issue, but that if the Djiboutian Military moved CJTF-HOA would have to "help them move." Olhaye went on to say that if freedom of access could be provided to the Djiboutian military, everything could be sorted out. He said his government was not happy with him when he signed and that "we are beyond the original map."

17. (S/NF) Olhaye stressed that frictions should be kept here at the local level and that there were problems with giving the General more ramp space at the Eastern edge of Camp Lemonier. The General responded that a written proposal was being drafted in Washington for additional acreage and the issue would have to be resolved at another level. Olhaye said he felt the French might have designs on that land as they were expanding with another 1,400 troops on the ground in Djibouti. When queried on the possibility of a new civilian airport on the other side of the bay from Camp Lemonier, Olhaye responded that "nothing was imminent."

18. (S/NF) In closing General Robeson stated that he hoped the proposal turned out to be amenable and acceptable to Djibouti. Olhaye responded that from his point of view everything should be done together rather than in piece meal fashion. The General concurred that a holistic approach would be best and he hoped we could move quickly on implementing a long term solution which does not hinder our warm relations. He said the easiest solution was to acknowledge that the airbase you want is yours and if additional space is needed eastward expansion is possible. General Robeson stressed that this issue should not affect the relationship at all and that he knew Generals Fahti and Zakaria had worked hard to maintain close relations with us. He said he had given his word that he would not go home until this issue had been resolved and that he was scheduled to depart in May.

RAGSDALE